

# Panhandle Health District

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[www.phd1.idaho.gov](http://www.phd1.idaho.gov)

## Food Inspection Results Available to Public

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Coeur d'Alene—For weeks you've dreamed about a juicy burger loaded with fresh onions, tomatoes and crunchy pickles, and you know just the place to find the best.

You invite your best friend, but she's not feeling well. She blames the goodies she bought at her social club's bake sale, which raises questions of food safety in your mind. You suddenly need to know that the place that prepares your favorite burgers is as sanitary and safe as it is popular with your stomach. How do you find out?

Visit the Panhandle Health District's (PHD) Web site—[www2.state.id.us/phd1/](http://www2.state.id.us/phd1/)--to find results from food inspections of area restaurants, catering companies, convenience stores, schools and other places that serve food to the public.

"We do the work and we want the information available to the public," said Dale Peck, director of the health district's Environmental Health, Response and Information Technology division. "We also wanted to give incentive to the food industry to be concerned about food safety."

The results of food inspections in the five northern counties hit the Web in January following the example of other public health districts. Peck believed such public reporting reinforces positive practices in eating establishments.

"It's good incentive to meet standards and good advertising for the establishments," he said. "A consistent record with no violations is very positive."

Fifteen environmental health specialists at PHD inspect all 1,250 northern Idaho establishments that serve food to the public annually, said Kristina Keating, PHD's food program coordinator.

The dozens of practices they check fall into five main risk categories: food storage temperatures; personal hygiene; cleanliness of equipment; cooking procedures; and source of food. The food inspection Web site lists violations by establishment name in each of those categories.

It also explains the categories so viewers understand the violation. An establishment with a food storage temperature violation may have left raw meat sitting unnoticed on a counter rather than in the refrigerator. Poor hand-washing may lead to a personal hygiene violation.

Cutting vegetables on a surface that wasn't sanitized after holding meat is an example of an equipment cleanliness violation. Undercooking meat or fish without warning diners of the risk earns a violation in the cooking procedure category. And serving meat that's not USDA-inspected or goodies made at home violates proper food source requirements.

Food inspections take from 30 minutes to several hours, depending on the size of the establishment. Inspections occur without notice. They're a snapshot—one moment in time—which the public should remember as it checks out dining establishments online, Keating said.

"We use inspections as a good education tool," Keating said. "We're not food cops."

Correcting violations as they're identified is common, she said, but not always possible. Establishments with five or more critical violations receive follow-up inspections. The results from those second inspections are included on the Web site.

"We don't have too many that need follow-up," Keating said. "For the most part, food establishments in the five northern counties are pretty good. And that includes schools."

Schools are inspected twice annually.

Food inspections online can be found at [www2.state.idaho.us/phd1/](http://www2.state.idaho.us/phd1/), Panhandle Health District's Web site. The link to the Environmental Health, Response and Information Technology division will lead to a link for Environmental Health, which leads to a link to the food program, which leads to a link to food establishment inspections.

Searchers can find specific food establishments by name or location or can access a list of all establishments by listing no name or location.

"It gives a general idea how a restaurant is doing on the particular day it was inspected," Keating said. "It's hard to say it's representative, but it's good information to have at your fingertips."